

THE MENASHA TIMES

August



2016

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE MENASHA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A Park's Past Remembered

First of a 3-Part Series

On the historic grounds where the Winnebago Indians two hundred years ago, built their wigwams and buried their dead, residents of Menasha will gather Sunday (July – 1965), to observe the 68th anniversary of the donation of Smith Park to the City of Menasha by Elisha Smith. After James Doty purchased the island from the U.S. government in 1835, the settlers came, cutting their roads through the oak and elm forests and building their homes near what is now Winnebago Avenue. The Winnebago Indians had moved southward.

There will be few among the Sunday celebrants who will be able to recall the stories or envision what the east end of Doty's Island looked like in those years prior to the creation of Smith Park in 1897. However, among those who can describe a word picture of the area during this period are Joseph Coyle, 346 Nicolet Blvd., Menasha and William Webster, 318 Fourth Street, Neenah. Both men were born and raised in this location and have lived more than 80 years on the island.

Coyle's mother, Mary Powers, came to Menasha in 1845 from County Claire, Ireland, as one of the first settlers to the new community. After the death of her first husband, she married Patrick Coyle. The Coyle's later purchased a log cabin and truck farmed at the corner of Winnebago Avenue and Nicolet Blvd. The Coyle's abandoned the log cabin and built a new home on the same site which continues to stand at 365 Winnebago Ave. For many years, Mrs. Coyle served the village as a midwife.

Webster's father, George, moved from Sheboygan to Appleton in 1879 and purchased a house in Menasha in 1882. The same structure stands at 636 Nicolet Blvd. The house had been built in the Civil War era. Webster and Coyle believe that at one time the home was used as a club house for the nearby race course. George Webster was employed as a machinist at the Howard and Jennings Machine Co., Menasha.

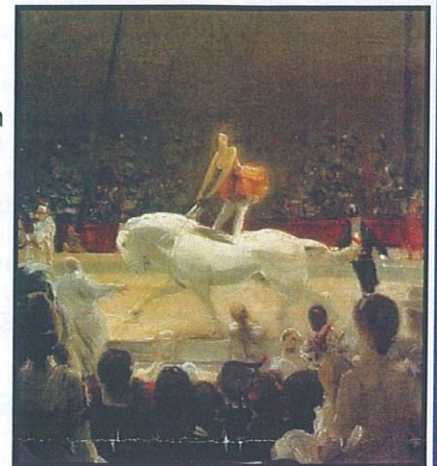
As the two Menashans create a word picture tour of the Smith Park area in the 1890's, they begin at the corner of Naymut Street and Nicolet Blvd., then known as "the Avenue." Opposite this corner, on the Neenah side, the permanent rings for the annual summer circus could be seen.

The tourist probably would either ride in a buggy or walk down a path that was made through the brush, growing wildly on each side of the mud road, toward Lake Winnebago. Immediately he would pass John Schubert's hay fields, extending from Naymut to Cleveland Streets. The hay was sold to the neighbors for their horses and cows. Across "the Avenue" were the Clovis neighborhood pastures and the farm lands of William Stridde which included the area from Ninth Street beyond the present Park Drive, to the mouth of the Fox River.

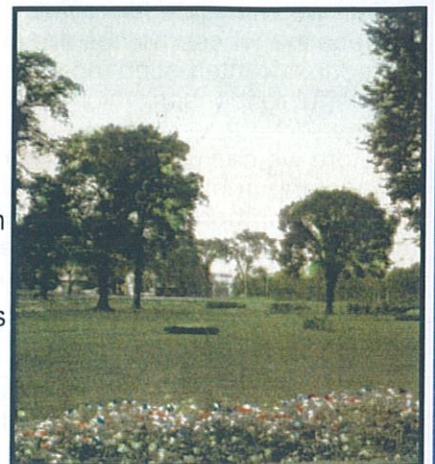
At this time it would be difficult to see the Cleveland Street area since it was overgrown with weeds. However, the north end of the street contained the homes of Mike Grode, a carpenter, and John Schreiner, an employee of the Menasha Wooden Ware. Later the street was dug out for fill in the swamp areas on the north end of Smith Park. The room was filled with quarry chips hauled from the stone quarry on the lower end of the Stridde farm. The quarry presently is the Ernst Mahler pool. *(continued on page 2)*



Detail from print with Winnebago village on Doty Island



"The Circus" - G.W. Bellows



View of the park - 1900

(Park Remembered from page 1) Adjacent to the Webster house was the Turner Society park grounds, enclosed with a wood fence. The dance and band platforms and the two beer stands had been built around the Indian mounds. Directly across from the Turner park was the Stridde farm house.

North of the society's park, on the present site of the Smith Park softball diamond, stood a red brick, one room school house with a bell tower, known as the Island School. Miss Jessie Nugent was the first teacher and Miss Amy Granden was the last teacher. Prior to the development of Smith Park, the school building was moved to Nicolet Blvd., and according to Webster, is the present home of Mrs. Ed Terrian, 508 Nicolet Blvd.

As Coyle and Webster reminisced, the listener is taken from Park St., down to Lake Winnebago, along the dirt road "Avenue." On the Neenah side, he would pass the aristocratic horse racing track, popular throughout the area in the 1880's and 90's. Enthusiasts from substantial distances would bring their sulkies and purebreds to race on the track. Bordering the west side of the track was the small grandstand in front of the 12 stall stable and huge barn. According to Coyle the track was originally operated by a James Brown, with Milwaukee interests, and was built about 1881.

At the end of "the Avenue" on the Menasha side, was a small, one story rectangular shaped house which Webster believes was a log cabin at one time and then covered with wood siding. Coyle claims that whoever operated the lighthouse at the mouth of the Fox River lived in the bungalow. Supposedly a man known as "Indian Joe," operated the lighthouse at one time, Coyle recalled. - by William Herziger

(look for Part Two of this article in our next newsletter)



Sulky racing



Doty Island Map

WPT to Focus on Neenah-Menasha

We are very pleased to announce that the Menasha Historical Society has been contacted by Wisconsin Public Television. Both Neenah and Menasha will be featured in the next presentation of 'Wisconsin Hometown Stories.' Preparation for the program has already begun. Two "listening sessions" were held at the Elisha D. Smith Public Library. The sessions were attended by local citizens who shared stories about their lives and the early history of Menasha. The producer of the program will be contacting some of the attendees for further interviews. PBS staff will also be visiting our Museum to view photos and artifacts from early Menasha. The program will take about a year to complete. Tentatively, it will be aired in early 2017. If you have any stories you wish to submit in writing, please send them to us at menashahistorical.com. Additionally, we would be happy to have you visit the Museum to share your stories. Please call (920) 840 - 4373 to set up a time to visit. In addition to the television airing of the program, DVD copies will be provided to the Menasha Joint School District. We have been hosting school groups who tour our Resource Center, the Isle of Valor and the caboose located in Smith Park. This television presentation will also be a great additional resource to teachers of local history. We are very pleased to have this wonderful opportunity to showcase the city of Menasha!

Make Your December 8th Christmas Banquet Plans

Although it's definitely NOT beginning to look a lot like Christmas, it's time for us to start planning our gala Christmas banquet. Our program this year will be "If Houses Could Talk..." which is a continuation of the postcard project we've initiated this year. We've begun sending postcards to residents of Menasha whose homes are over 100 years old, asking owners to share memories or interesting facts about their homes. We have received some wonderful responses which help us preserve the history of these historic homes.

Before we can choose a location, however, we need a fairly accurate count of the number of guests who plan to attend. Many places require a certain number of guests in order to reserve rooms. If you think you may be attending, please call Delores Gear at (920) 722-3635 as soon as possible. **(Please note that you are definitely not obligated to attend by responding at this time)**

We know that the program will be interesting and we hope to see you (and any guests you may wish to invite) in December. We will try to keep the cost between \$18 and \$22 per person which we believe is a reasonable amount for dinner, entertainment and a guest speaker. THANK YOU for your willingness to assist us in our early planning efforts. We hope you enjoy the rest of this beautiful summer!



Photo from MHS archives



New Roof for Smith Park Caboose

Above is a photo of the new roof being installed on the Smith Park Caboose enclosure. After the Caboose was refurbished nearly 2 years ago, we asked the City of Menasha to install security lighting and a new roof to the Caboose Pavilion. The lighting was installed last Fall and the new roof was just completed in early Summer.

Board member Dick Loehning has done extensive research on the caboose and has given some excellent presentations on its history to our community. Many other society members have also helped make the caboose one of the jewels in our collection.



The Picnic
by
Carl Spitzweg
1864

September Potluck Luncheon

Our Menasha Historical Society September potluck luncheon will be held on Thursday, Sept. 8 in the Smith Park Pavilion. (In the event of inclement weather, we will meet inside the Memorial Building).

We are pleased to announce that our guest speaker will be Richie Plass, whose talents include being a musician, published poet, dancer, author and former radio host. (See more biographical information regarding Mr. Plass in this newsletter).

Additional details for the luncheon are as follows:

Time: 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Please bring a dish to pass and a hunger for local history.

Items that will be provided include sandwiches, beverages, plates, cups and utensils.

We hope to have a great turn-out for this special presentation! Please join us!

New Additions to Exhibit!



The Menasha Historical Society is pleased to announce the acquisition of some new military items. Come see the complete military exhibit at the Resource Center and Museum.



Vintage Gem Advertising

Richie Plass to Speak at Potluck Lunch

Information from: Native Voices Booking & Management

A drummer with the renowned country group Wolf River Band for 30 years, Richie Plass is also an actor (and sometimes comedian!) with a long background in business and manufacturing as well as tribal politics and economic development. But his lectures and sessions on "Trails of the Menominee: A Discussion of Native American Diversity" are where his heart really lies.

Plass lectures on education, culture, traditions, professional environment and social impact. His sessions deal with issues such as Menominee and general Native American history, past and present Native American issues such as logos and mascots, Native American lore and performing arts, as well as dealing with and living in a world of different cultures.

His multi-faceted background includes an Associate Degree in Architecture, Director of Tribal Economic Development on the Menominee Reservation, diversity training, and sports editor for his school paper. Plass is also a published poet.



Curtis Reed - 'Father of Menasha'

Curtis Reed was born in Massachusetts on March 16, 1815. When he was 20 years old, his family of 10 made the long journey from out East to Wisconsin – the "West," as it was known back then.

Their destination was Milwaukee, where Reed began working as a clerk in the store of Solomon Juneau, later recognized as Milwaukee's founder. This association helped Reed become acquainted with many prominent and influential citizens, which led him into the exciting world of politics.

In 1846, the Territorial Legislature of Wisconsin granted Curtis Reed and his associates, James and Charles Doty, a charter to build a dam across the northern branch of the Fox River. In 1848, Reed decided to move to the Fox River Valley to proceed with his plans for the dam. He negotiated with James Doty (who later became governor) for part ownership of a tract of land where Menasha now stands.

Reed was the first white settler to move into this wilderness. Soon after arriving, he constructed the first two public buildings. He completed the dam in 1849, then constructed the first canal and first lock. He is credited with convincing the federal government to build the canal on the north branch of the Fox River rapids—instead of Neenah's south branch. That was a pivotal decision since the canal was vitally important to early industry...and work on the project had already begun in Neenah.

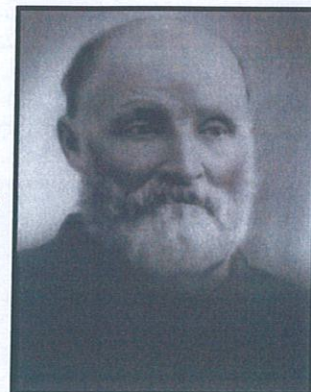
When Menasha was incorporated as a village on July 5, 1853, Reed was elected as its first president. He went on to serve the community in many capacities. The number of offices he held is an indication of how highly regarded he was by his contemporaries.

Curtis Reed believed in Menasha...even when it was nothing more than a tract of woodland on the Fox River. He put his heart and soul into developing a vision that made Menasha what it is today.

In 1848, Curtis Reed negotiated with James Doty for part ownership of a large tract of land where Menasha now stands, and they platted over 300 acres into town lots. Sixty-six acres of the present downtown were purchased for \$838. In the center, where Chute and Milwaukee Streets enter Main Street, Reed arranged a "Town Square" like the New England towns had. It was an open space, with a flagpole in the center, which could be used for various festivities and gatherings. Developers later changed the plan so that there is no longer a true center.

Curtis Reed held a number of elective offices, which was an indication of the esteem with which he was held. He was supervisor of the town several times. He was the first village president and served in that capacity several subsequent times. He was postmaster for five years during Cleveland's first term and was reappointed in 1894 and was serving at the time of his death. In 1890, Reed was elected Mayor of Menasha and served two terms.

Many pioneers have been honored with statues, plaques, and other public displays, but the name "Father of Menasha" is truly a very well-deserved and distinct honor. Nearly every good thing that happened during the early development of our city can be credited to his efforts.



OFFICERS & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

INTERIM PRESIDENT Nick Jevne

VICE-PRESIDENT Kathy Humski

SECRETARY Dolores Gear

TREASURER Nick Jevne

Nancy Barker Paul Brunette Shirley Heinz Kevin Jurgella

Tom Konetzke Dick Loehning Nancy Ropella

RESOURCE CENTER & MUSEUM

(Located at 640 Keyes Street)

P.O. Box 255

Menasha, WI 54952

menashahistorical@yahoo.com

www.menashahistorical.webs.com

920 - 840 - 4373